

## DESIGNING *BLENDED LEARNING* PROGRAM FOR ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (AN INITIATION TO CREATE COLLABORATIVE TEACHINGS AMONG ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES)

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### Abstract

In the light of globalisation era, Islamic higher education faces many challenges ranging from theoretical to methodological approaches. It seems that Islamic universities are seeking any alternatives to improve its teaching qualities through multi-dimensional approaches. Now days, the need to connect and interact among Islamic universities both national and international level seems to be current trend. According to my experience when I was acted as a program manager on managing four online courses (on leadership, financial management, external collaboration, and quality assurance training) facilitated by the USAID-Indonesia in collaboration with Master Program of Higher Education Management of UGM, I assume that the method can be adopted for teachings (Islamic education subjects, etc.) in Islamic universities. The method is *blended learning* that is the combination between face to face meeting and interactions through the online media. On the implementation of the program, there should be a website as an interactive media with the participants. The web provides rules on how to follow the program, time schedule, and course materials. Each week, participants need to spend only three hours to read course materials before the online meeting begin. To make it real on Islamic teaching, it should be an agreement among universities on using *blended learning* as a new method for Islamic teachings. Once the agreement completed, there should be a university that acted as a host to facilitate the *blended learning* program. The host university provides all facilities to support *blended learning* program which includes a web address, media webinar, and a representative room. All materials are provided by the facilitators from among the involved universities. The host invites the facilitators when online meeting will begin. Using this *blended learning* hopefully will benefit the university students on enriching their knowledge through the interactions with the facilitators all over the world. Institutionally, the program will enhance Islamic universities networks with other universities both national and particularly international universities.

**Keywords:** Blended learning, Islamic higher education, Islamic teachings, collaborative teachings.

### Introduction

The development of Islamic Higher Education both private and state has been progressing quite significant. The Islamic Higher Institutions such as STAINs some of them are turning into IAINs, as well as from IAINs into UINs. The change of status with the expectation that the IAINs / UINs are able to compete on a competitive basis. The most significant changes are in terms of physical facilities. Today, Islamic universities such as UIN, many of which have a magnificent and adequate building. Nonetheless, in terms of quality the Islamic universities have not been able to demonstrate the real competitiveness. For example, based on a survey conducted by Webometric (July 2016 edition), only two Islamic universities that successfully occupies the best Indonesian university rank under 20 that is UAD (occupied no 17<sup>th</sup> and UII with its 20<sup>th</sup> position). In fact, Indonesia has the largest number of Islamic universities in the World, which is about 6,000 Islamic higher education institutions (Republika, March 8, 2015).

One of the challenges facing the Islamic university that is how to improve teaching quality. By the rapid technological developments, the Islamic university is required to adapt to these developments. With this rapid growth of technology and communication, the projected future educational environments have the same theme that is education will depend on the technology, telecommunications, and networks

(Chang, 2006: 31). Young people grow up with technology and have adapted to various technological devices for life and learning (Chang, 2006: 31). Therefore, traditional and passive education no longer suitable for them; they require more active learning environment and technological support (Chang, 2006: 32).

In response to the using technology for teaching in higher education, I propose *blended learning* as an alternative for improving teaching quality. The choice based on my own experience when I was managing an online training through the blended learning method. I assumed that the program could be implemented for Islamic higher education.

### **What is blended learning?**

Although there is no single definition on blended learning, it can be stated that blended learning is a mix between onsite or face to face meeting with the online experiences that is to produce more effective, efficient, and also flexible learning (Stein and Graham, 2014: 12). In a more detail definition, Throne (2003: 16) clearly defined blended learning as below:

“Blended learning is the most logical and natural evolution of our learning agenda. It suggests an elegant solution to the challenges of tailoring learning and development to the needs of individuals. It represents an opportunity to integrate the innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and participation offered in the best of traditional learning. It can be supported and enhanced by using the wisdom and one-to-one contact of personal coaches.”

The benefit of benefits of blended learning is it can provide specific opportunities to students, teachers, and administration such as to increase access and convenience, improve learning, and decrease costs. Institutionally, by applying blended learning as a learning method it is probably will increase students attractiveness (Stein and Graham, 2014: 14, 18). It is mentioned also by Keengwe (2014), that the advantages of using blended learning for teaching and learning that it can enhance the “real time” interaction with learning materials, discussions with instructors and among colleges. Besides, it also facilitates actionable feedback without having to wait until the next meeting in compare to traditional learning. As mentioned before, one of the driving factors for the increased use of technology for learning such as blended learning is that majority of students currently attending the class consist of a generation who are familiar with technological tools and devices.

However, those benefits can be obtained if it is designed seriously and followed the standards. There for there are requirements to implement the blended learning. First, *formalized*: it means that the implementation blended learning should be based on the reason that young regeneration need to have new innovative media for their learning. Second, *adaptable*: it can accommodate a wide range of teaching styles. Third, *standardized*: it utilizes standard approaches and measures for instructional design and outcomes assessment. Finally, *integrative and synergetic*: the blended learning should synthesize a variety of existing teaching models and combine complementary of online learning (Bielawski and Metcalf, 2003: 76-77).

The most important point of designing an online learning through the blended learning is that it is intended to create an inquiry of community. As stated by Garrison and Vaughan (2008: 32) that building a blended learning requires understanding on integrating between verbal (synchronic) and text (a-synchronic) communication. Therefore, sustaining the blended learning should be framed by three essential elements of a community of inquiry—social, cognitive, and teaching presence. The social element consist of self-motivation on how to encourage collaboration among participants and to make an open communication that is free of risk expression. Cognitive element on the other hand is a commitment to exchange information, connect ideas, and apply new ideas. Teaching presence means that blended learning should be based on designing curriculum and methods that correspond to the program (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008).

The prospect of blended learning in Asia—in particular—has been explored by Latchem and Jung (2009) by stating that there is significant indication that blended learning has future in higher

education. As the example, Open University in Asia has already combined between blended teaching and face to face meeting (onsite). The use of blended learning is vital for the Open University learning process. Since the students are working class that have limited time to study, so blended learning is accepted because it is flexible and easy to access.

## **The Implementation of *blended learning* program**

### **Host university**

The implementation of blended learning to create collaborative teaching is based on the memorandum of understanding at least between two universities. The two universities can choose what subjects that are going to be designed for blended teaching. As a collaborative teaching the curriculums should be correspond to the need of students from both university. If the agreement between the two universities has been fixed then the next step is to determine who is going to be a host university. The task of the host university is to provide all facilities for blended learning process. The facilities consist of infrastructure, human resources, and also IT support. For infrastructure, there should be a representative room that has facilities such as a screen video, camera (at least two), audio devices, and internet connection. While human resources are those who are going to be the facilitators during the blended learning process. For IT support, the most important thing is that the host university should subscribe a Webinar provider to facilitate the teaching process through the online.

### **Participants**

The participants of the blended learning program are from selected university students based on the material courses offered by the university. Before conducting the blended learning, the participants are encouraged to understand to roles on how to follow the program. On the implementation, the participants should read all course materials on the web. They learn and respond to the questions and assessments on the modules. The students have three weeks to study the modules.

### **Course materials**

The offered courses are called as module that consist of sub modules. It depends on the credit of the courses. Each module should be pioneered by a lecturer that expert on the subject. Every modules are completed with questions, exercises, and self-assessment. Course materials also consist of videos that introduce to the students on how to follow the course and summary of the modules. As the example, if the course title is Islamic *Law* so it should be an introduction on the course, the syllabus, number of meetings, exercise, quiz, and self-assessment.

### **Website**

All course materials are uploaded on the Web and ready to down load. The materials are modules, videos, introduction on how to follow the program, time schedule. The main function of the Web is to update all information related to the blended learning process. Besides, the Website also provide a link on how to follow a Webinar session. The Web also up load any response from the participants to the questions that already exist on the modules or response during the webinar session. The purpose of this is to make sure that all responses from the participants are valuable and significant during the learning process.

### **Assessment and evaluation**

The ability of participants on understanding and also responding to the modules and facilitators explanation during the learning process are key factors for the evaluation. Transfer knowledge to the participants are measured by the evaluation elements that consist of main and proxy indicators. Main indicators particularly pay attention to the cognitive domain of the participants that stress on how the participants perceive the modules and elaborate it during the Webinar sessions. Verbal interactions become the key success for the participants during the learning process. However, for the passive

participants, proxy indicators are helpful on giving evaluation to the activeness of the participant during the Webinar sessions.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Designing a blended learning in a university class can be functioned as an additional method of learning process. However, it also can be developed as a full system such as implemented by the Open University in Indonesia. The willingness of university leaders on integrating new method of teaching are very urgent. Since the blended learning is new method especially for Islamic universities, the benefits of the blended learning should be promoted as one of the alternative for teaching method. Blended learning can combine between face to face and online teaching. For private university, blended learning can overcome room/class management because of over capacity of students. Besides, it will attract those who are familiar with new technologies and devices. In short, blended learning can be adopted since the university is willing to implement new method of teaching.

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